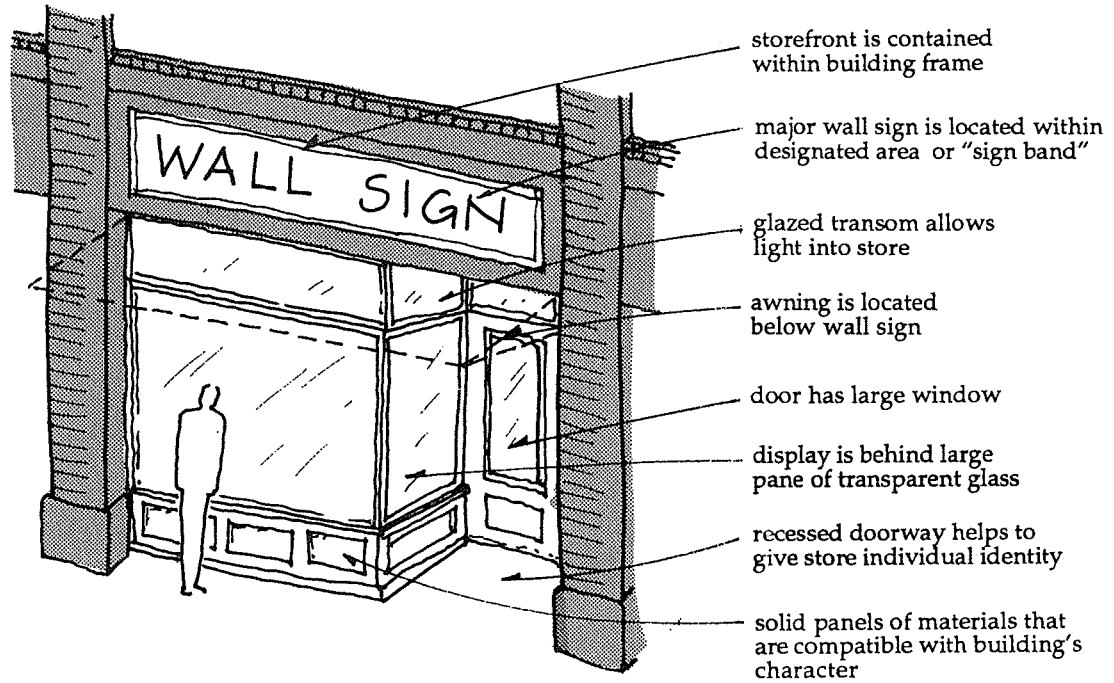


Memorandum

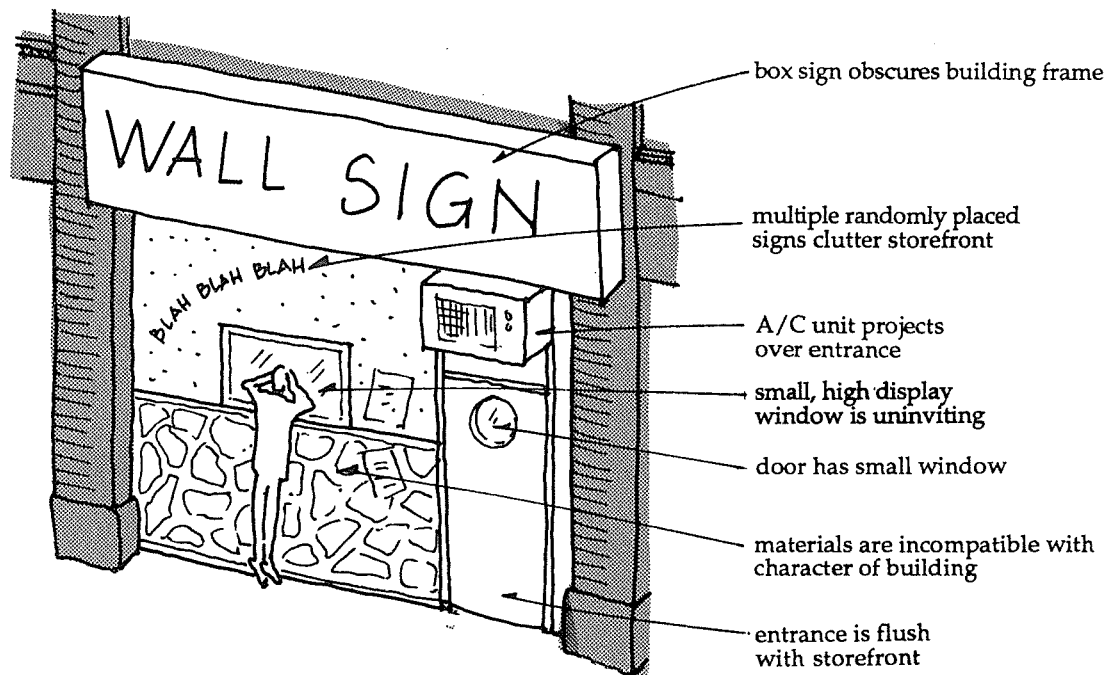
Date: 15 April 2008
To: Downtown Study Committee (DSC)
From: Jon Oxman
Re: Needham Downtown Study
Subject: **Design Guidelines – Table of Contents**

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"GOOD" STOREFRONT DESIGN



"BAD" STOREFRONT DESIGN



3.0 Signs should be compatible with the building, neighboring buildings and the character of the Center as a whole. Signs should be carefully located within the sign band where one exists to avoid obscuring important architectural features.

Signs should be designed to present a clear message about the business they serve. With careful consideration, and high quality design, signs can add a new level of visual refinement to the streetscape. Signs are also one of the least expensive and most effective ways to enhance a storefront.

Signs must be carefully considered in relation to neighboring signs and the facades of the buildings in the Center as a whole. Signs for a row of storefronts in the same building should all be of similar size, material and proportion. They should all be located similarly on the building. While it is not necessary for such signs to be all the same color or design, they should look like a family - in this way they reinforce, rather than compete with, each other.

The sign alone should not attempt to convey the entire story a merchant wants to relay. Too many different signs can overwhelm viewers. The end result is that none of the intended messages are conveyed. It is the careful combination of sign, building, storefront and window display working together that has the greatest impact.

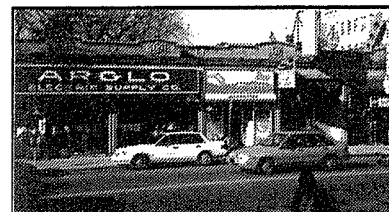
There are four basic types of signs: wall, projecting, window and freestanding. Their use depends upon their context within the Town. Within the core commercial area, on building facades along Great Plain Avenue, Chapel Street and Highland Avenue and on the backs of commercial buildings facing parking lots, wall signs, projecting signs, and window signs are appropriate to use. At the edge of the commercial area, freestanding signs can be used to provide effective signs for buildings of residential character. Different guidelines apply to each category of sign and these are outlined in the subsequent sections.

WALL SIGNS

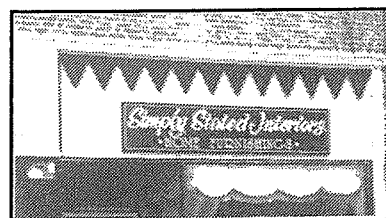
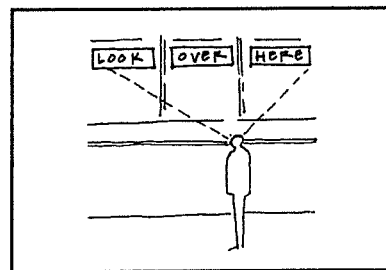
Of all types of signs, wall signs need to be seen from furthest away and should contain simple information such as the name of the store and the type of business.

3.1 Use the wall sign as the primary business sign. It is viewed from furthest away, often from across the street, and should be legible from that distance. Wall signs should be carefully sized to fit in with the building's facade design and should avoid obscuring important architectural features.

(i) Types of signs: Board signs use a background board, generally rectangular in shape, which contains the letters, graphic image and logo, where applicable. Individual letters mounted directly on a building can also create appealing signs. Neon signs as the major wall sign are discouraged.



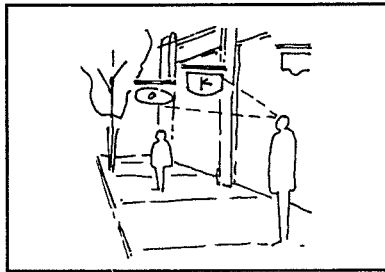
Too many signs on one storefront create visual clutter and ultimately the legibility of any one sign is obscured.



Board sign: an example of a well-placed, clear wall sign.



Individual letter sign: individual letters contrast in color and material with wall surface for maximum legibility.



A projecting sign should complement the storefront and may further express the character of the type of store or the Town itself.

(ii) *Size and placement:* The size of a wall sign depends on the width of the street as well as the size of the business. Locate the sign within the sign band where one exists. Do not cover up important architectural details such as cornices, piers and other elements. The top of the sign should not exceed the underside of the sills of the upper level windows, the lowest portion of the roof, or the top of the parapet in the case of single story buildings with parapets - whichever is lowest. Wall signs in Needham Center may not exceed 12" in thickness. Internally illuminated wall signs are discouraged in Needham Center. Box signs with a white background are usually dull during the daytime and glaringly bright at night and are, therefore, not very readable. If an internally illuminated box sign is required, it should have lightly colored letters on an opaque background for greatest legibility.

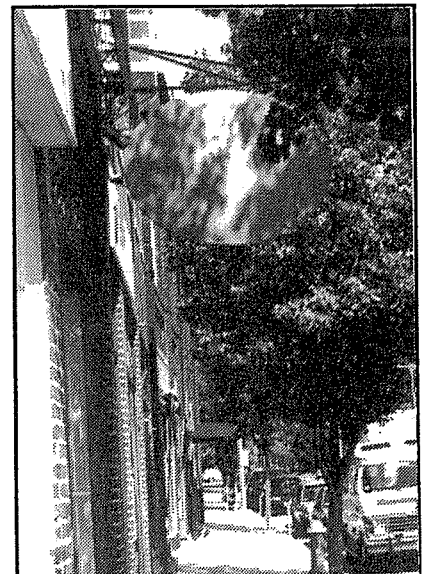
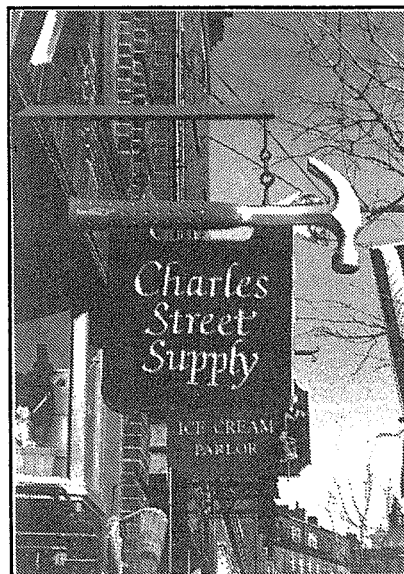
(iii) *Lettering:* Signs on main facades should generally use letters which range from 8" to 14" high. Smaller letters for smaller stores and larger letters for larger stores are recommended. Internally illuminated individual letters are not encouraged.

PROJECTING SIGNS

The Town of Needham recognizes the special character that high quality projecting signs can add to the streetscape. These signs should be small and unique in character. Projecting signs are seen from a closer distance than wall signs. They are viewed from medium/short range - and especially by pedestrians on the sidewalk.

3.2 Use projecting signs where appropriate in order to complement the storefront and to catch pedestrians' attention as they walk along the street.

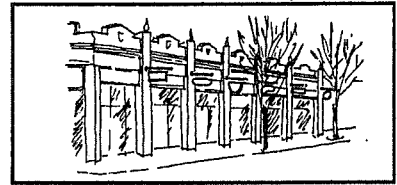
(i) *Types of Signs:* Often, a three-dimensional object or special shape makes the most effective projecting sign. Merchants can use these signs to express what is unique about their merchandise or their business - for example, a hammer-shaped sign for a hardware store, or an eyeglasses-shaped sign for an optometrist. Projecting signs are not, usually, considered the predominant sign for any business. Internally illuminated projecting sign boxes tend to look heavy and are strongly discouraged.



(ii) *Size and placement:* Projecting signs should be small - no bigger than 6 square feet in area - and eye catching. Signs should be located so that if the underside of the sign projects over the sidewalk, it is at least 8 feet above grade. Signs should not project more than 6 feet from the facade of the building or half the width of the sidewalk, whichever is less. They should not block visibility of neighboring signs.

(iii) *Lettering:* Letters should be 4" to 10" high.

(iv) *Special Concerns:* The information on a projecting sign need not duplicate the information on the wall sign - it should augment the primary sign, describing the business in a different, more visual, way. The design should be carefully coordinated with the building, the storefront and the design of the primary wall sign. The bracket from which the sign hangs is part of the overall sign design. If several stores within a building are to have projecting signs, their design and placement should be considered together and in general, they should be hung at the same height.



A streetscape can be positively enhanced through the use of projecting signs.

WINDOW SIGNS

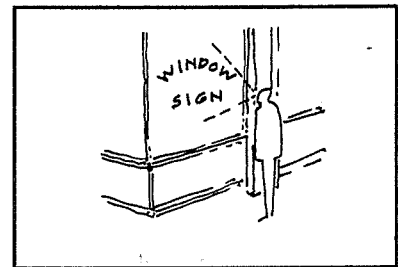
Window signs are seen from short range - from in front of the store.

3.3 Use window signs to provide more detailed information and to complement the window display. Signs painted on storefront glass are a traditional and effective way to present this information.

(i) *Types of signs:* Lettering may be hand painted directly on glass, etched in the glass or applied with vinyl, die-cut letters. White, light colors or gold leaf are most legible for graphics on glass. Paper signs taped to glass never look good; temporary signs should be hung about one foot behind the glass, fixed to a rigid backing board and highlighted with display spot lights. Neon signs are allowed, but work best if they occupy a minimum amount of the display window.

(ii) *Size and location:* Signs painted on second floor windows are seen from a greater distance than those on first floor windows, and the letter size and amount of information must be adjusted accordingly. Lettering on first floor windows should cover no more than 20% of the glass area. Lettering on second floor windows should cover no more than 25% of the glass area.

(iii) *Lettering:* The size of the lettering may vary from 1/2" to 8". The amount of information to convey, the importance of the information, the design of the display area and the design of the storefront should all be considered in determining the height of letters.



GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR SIGN DESIGN

The following section contains general guidelines regarding materials, colors and lighting, as well as some suggestions regarding window display.

MATERIALS FOR SIGNS

(i) *Wood:* Wood can be used for backing or lettering. Wood is particularly useful for a sign that has carved, recessed or dimensional lettering or decoration. Use wood that allows the grain of the wood to contribute to the design. Large pieces of wood can crack or check as they age; exterior plywood (with protected edges) can help solve this problem.

(ii) *Metal:* Metal can be used for backing or lettering. Copper, bronze, brass and stainless steel offer richness and durability. Gold and silver leaf, properly applied, can last for fifty years or more.

Individual stainless steel letters can create a clean, long-lasting and sophisticated sign.



(iii) *Glass:* The transparency of glass allows graphics or lettering painted on its surface to float in space while also allowing a view beyond. Glass can be etched or sandblasted and lit from the top or bottom edge for dramatic effects. Glass may also be entirely backpainted with a solid color after lettering has been applied.

(iv) *Plastic:* This is likely to be most successful when used for individual letters. In large amounts, plastic can look flimsy and cheap. If used as a backing, it must be made rigid and can be placed in a frame. Vacuum-formed plastic faces in metal frames are generally inappropriate.

COLORS

(i) *Coordination:* Coordinate sign and building colors so that the entire face of the building works together to look attractive and draw attention. Too many colors used together on a sign (or on adjacent signs) tend to overwhelm the viewer. It is best to limit the number of colors on a sign to three or four. Any additional colors should be used sparingly as accents.

(ii) *Contrast:* Make sure that there is enough contrast between lettering and background colors. In general, lighter letters on a dark background are more legible than dark letters on a light background. This applies to signage applied to glass as well as board backing. If a building contains a number of shops, it is best if all signs have dark backgrounds and light letters or, light backgrounds and dark letters. Lack of this basic uniformity destroys the rhythm of a building's facade.

LIGHTING

Well-lit signs are particularly important for stores that stay open at night. Properly angled, bright lighting in display windows is also effective. Illuminated signs also attract attention after-hours and lend a warmth to a business district. Exterior lights can be controlled by timers or photo-electric cells. A full understanding of the lighting options for signage can help discourage the use of internally illuminated sign boxes.

(i) Incandescent light: Usually spots or flood lights attached to the building facade and spaced at intervals can illuminate the full area of a sign. There are a variety of exterior fixtures that can be used as a decorative element—from those with neutral, small housings to elaborate, fluted, gooseneck fixtures.

(ii) Fluorescent light: Properly shielded with hoods, a series of fluorescent fixtures can more uniformly light signs than incandescent spots. They are typically cooler in color, but new tube types can closely match the quality and color range of incandescent lights, which many people still prefer. Fluorescent fixtures typically look more utilitarian than incandescent ones and blend less easily with historic building facades; therefore, the provision of a valence to conceal the fixture is appropriate.

(iii) Backlit signs or letters: Micro-fluorescent tubes or neon behind solid letters or signs can provide a pleasant glow around an establishment's name.



A coordinated lighting system should be used for multiple storefronts of a single building.

General Notes:

- If a building has a series of storefronts, the lighting for their signs should be coordinated. If all storefronts have signs lit externally with hooded fluorescent lights, for example, all the lamp colors should be the same - all warm white, all cool white, etc.
- Although up-lighting signs from below is dramatic and allows fixtures to be more easily hidden, mounting fixtures above signs and lighting down avoids many weather and water-related problems.
- Bare bulbs, while appropriate for theaters, should be avoided on most buildings. Glare from unshielded lights makes adjacent signs or displays difficult to see.
- Overly bright signs, especially at night, can actually cause passers by to look away rather than read them.

4.0 Maintenance of buildings, signs, storefronts, landscaping and parking areas plays a central role in defining the character of the commercial areas of Town.

While these guidelines set out objectives for design, effective long-term maintenance will ensure that improvements, once made, remain a permanent feature of the Town. Regular maintenance of buildings and landscape elements will ensure long-term savings through avoidance of costly repairs. Regular repainting, for example, preserves a building from more costly repairs which may be necessary if it is delayed excessively. In addition, a new coat of paint can add a noticeable freshness to a building and so contribute to the area as a whole.

Dumpster areas, awnings and signs require frequent maintenance. Maintenance of plants is also particularly important to ensure their continued health.

Property owners and store owners are strongly encouraged to step back and review their property every six months with this checklist in hand:

- Is any paint peeling or faded?
- Has the window display been refreshed recently?
- Is the glass clean?
- Is the primary sign faded or dated?
- Is there any window advertising that is out of date?
- Is the awning in one piece? Is it faded or frayed?
- Does the exterior lighting work?
- Is there any rusted metal that should be treated?
- Is the dumpster enclosure clean? Painted?
- Are there trees, plants or planters that need pruning, fertilizing, or replanting?
- Are there other changes that would enliven the storefront and make it more inviting?

In short, does the building or store, front and back, still convey the image of a successful business that is proud of what it offers and wants to attract customers?